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(54) **PROTECTION DEVICE FOR DC
COLLECTION SYSTEMS**

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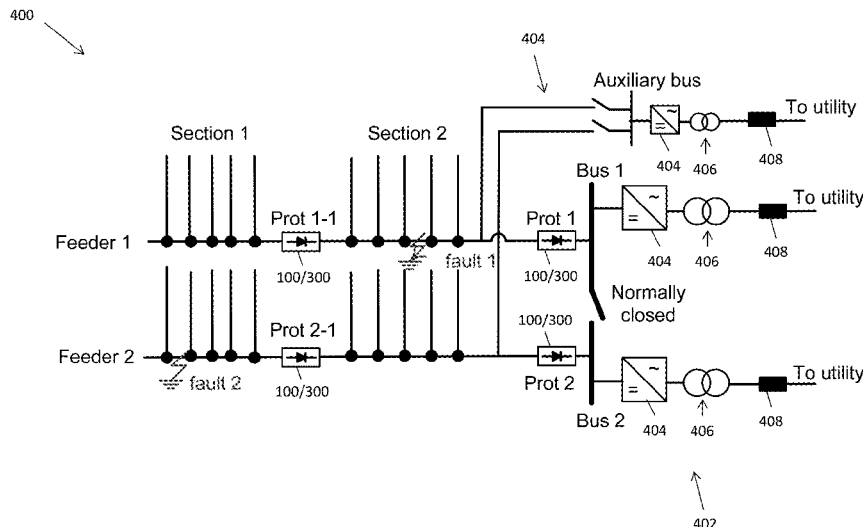
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ABSTRACT

A protection device includes a diode having its forward direc-
tion in a normal power flow of a region of a DC collection
system, a first switch in parallel with the diode, a second
switch in series with the diode and a control unit for control-
ling the switches. The first switch can be opened so that
current can flow through the diode in the forward direction
without the first switch bypassing the diode, and closed if no
current is flowing through the diode in the forward direction
and power is needed upstream of the diode. The second
switch can be closed so that current can flow through the
diode in the forward direction to an AC grid interface of the
DC collection system, and opened if no current is flowing
through the diode in the forward direction due to a fault in a
DC feeder to which the device is coupled.

20 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



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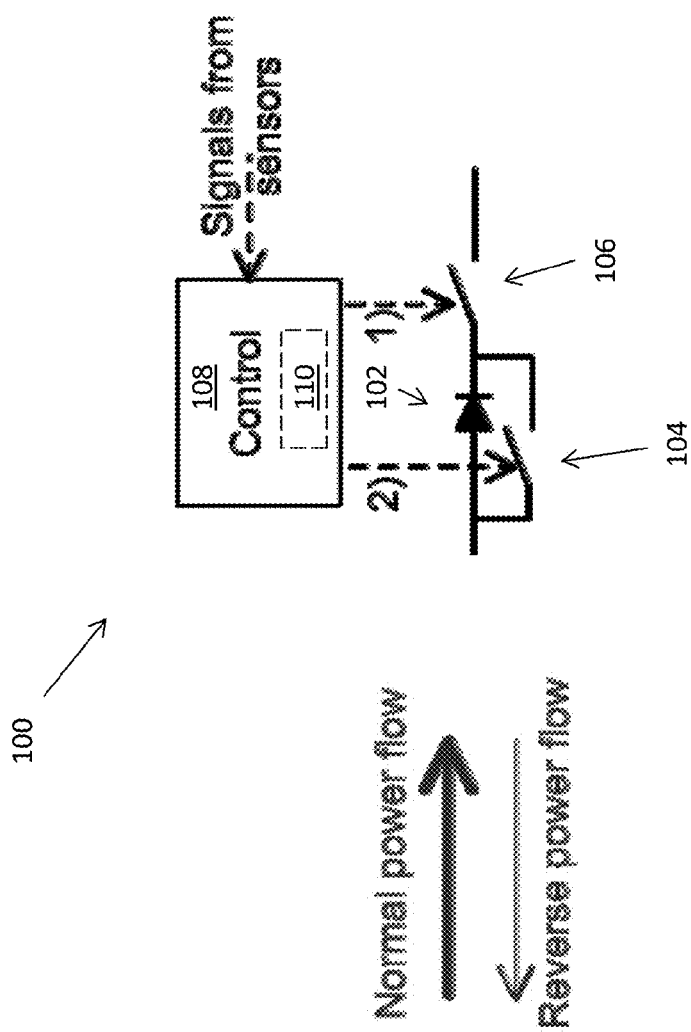


Figure 1

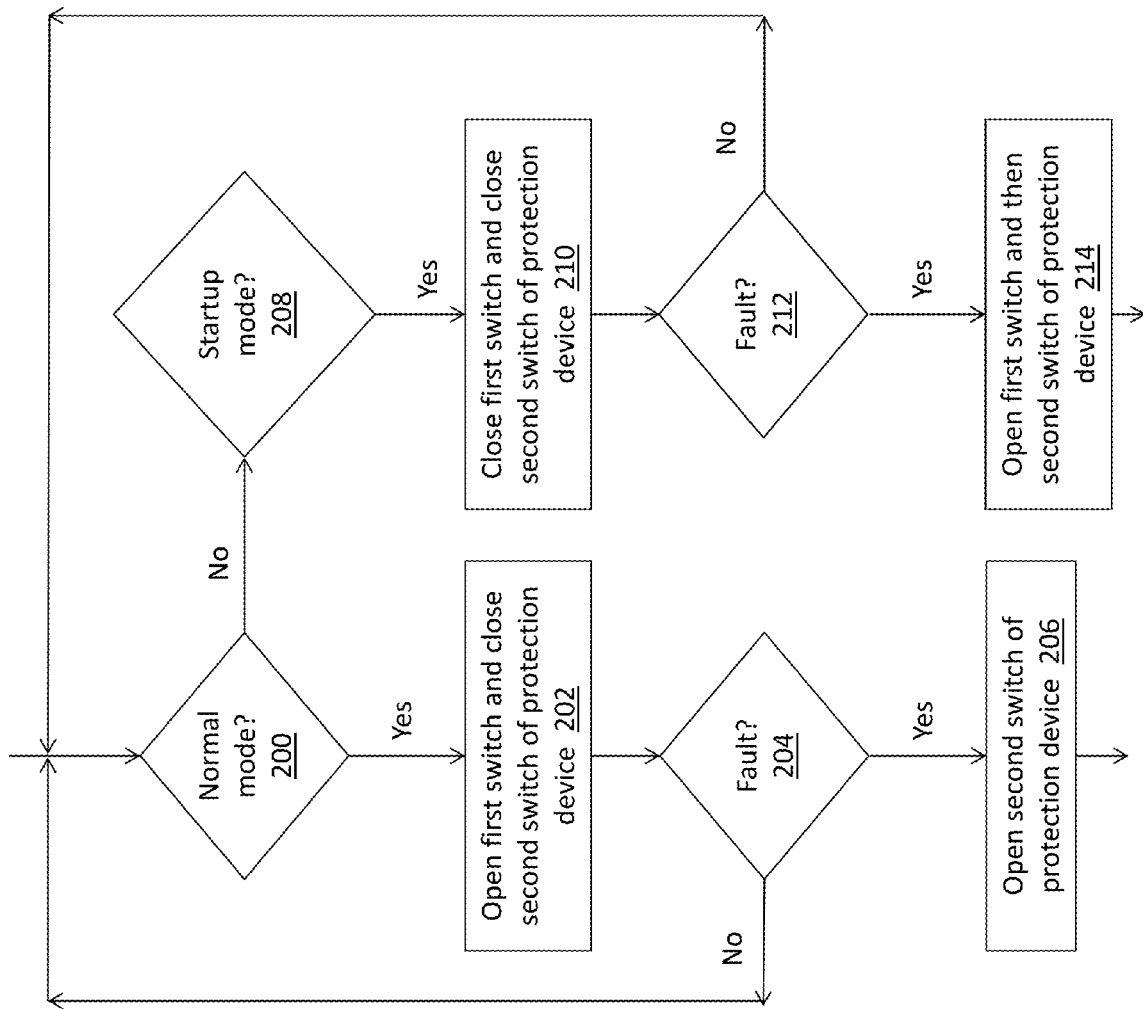


Figure 2

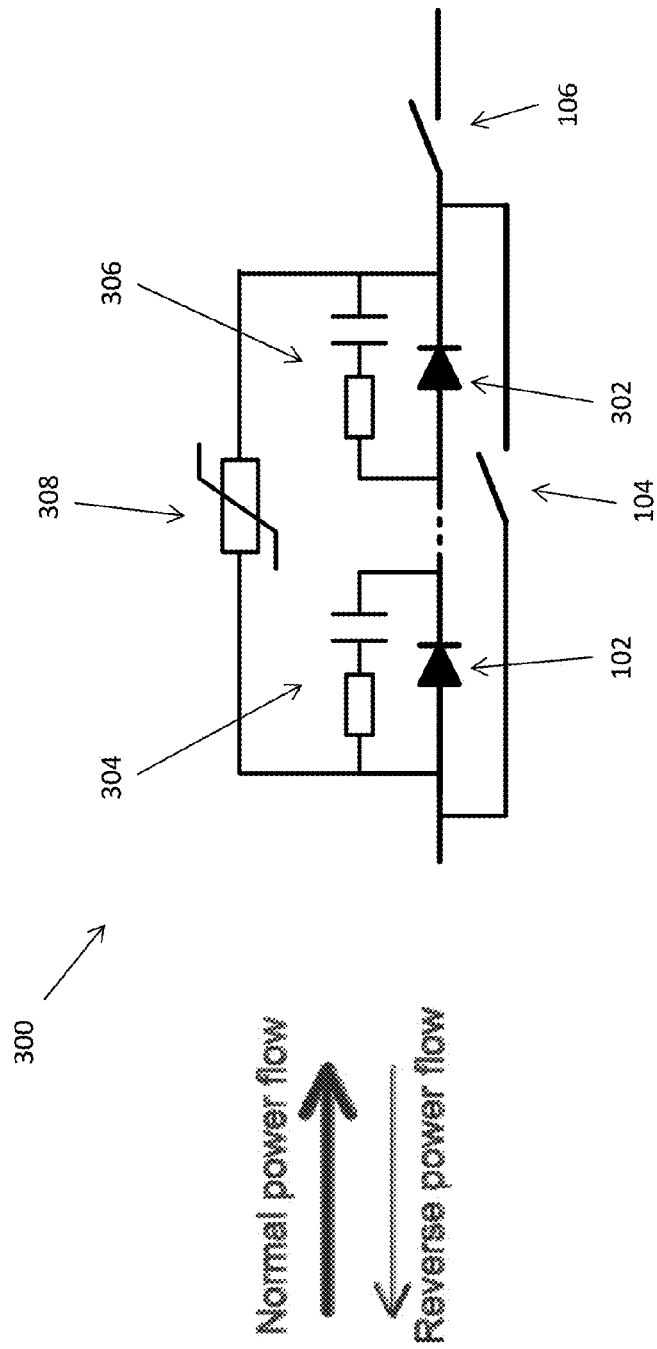


Figure 3

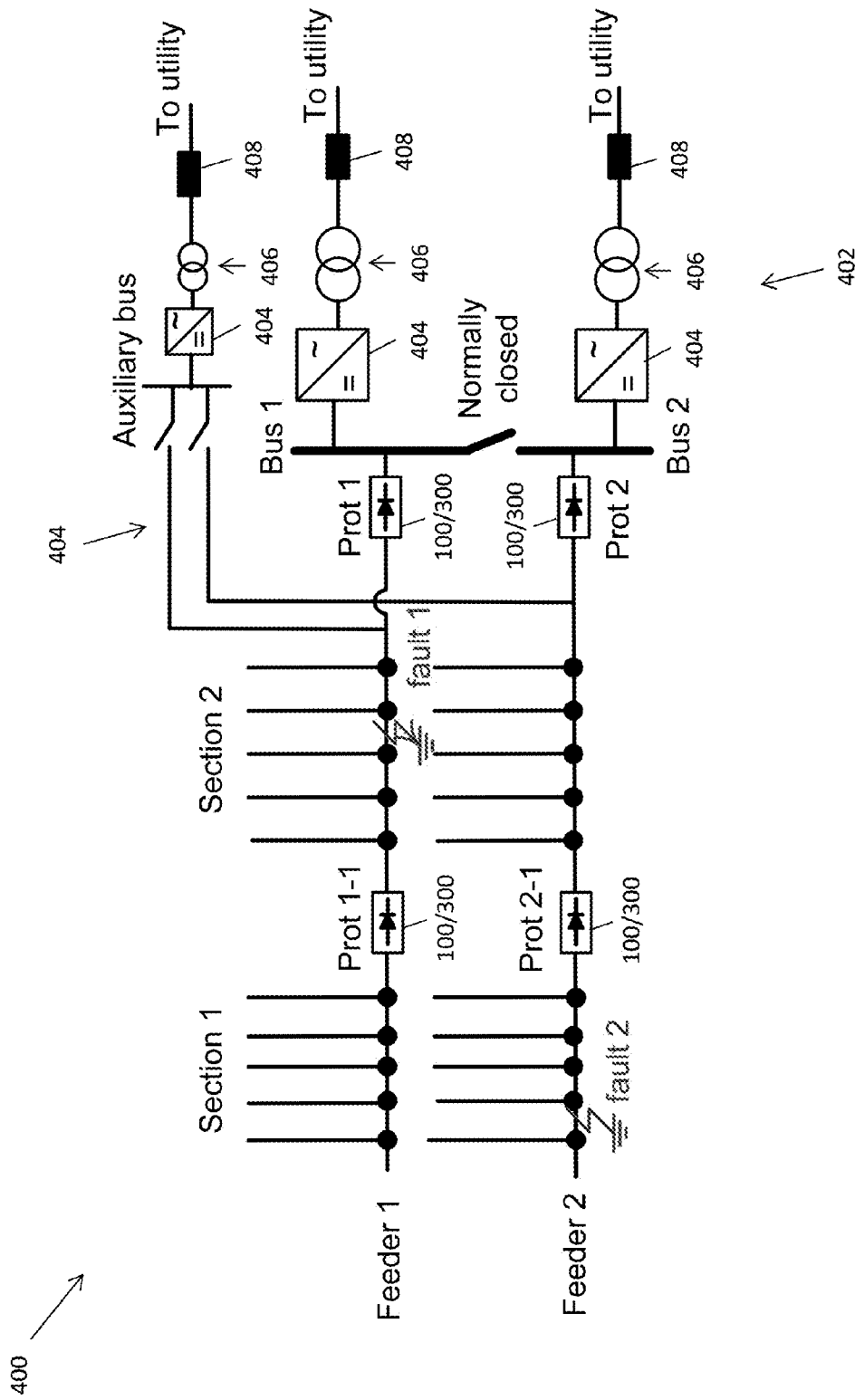


Figure 4

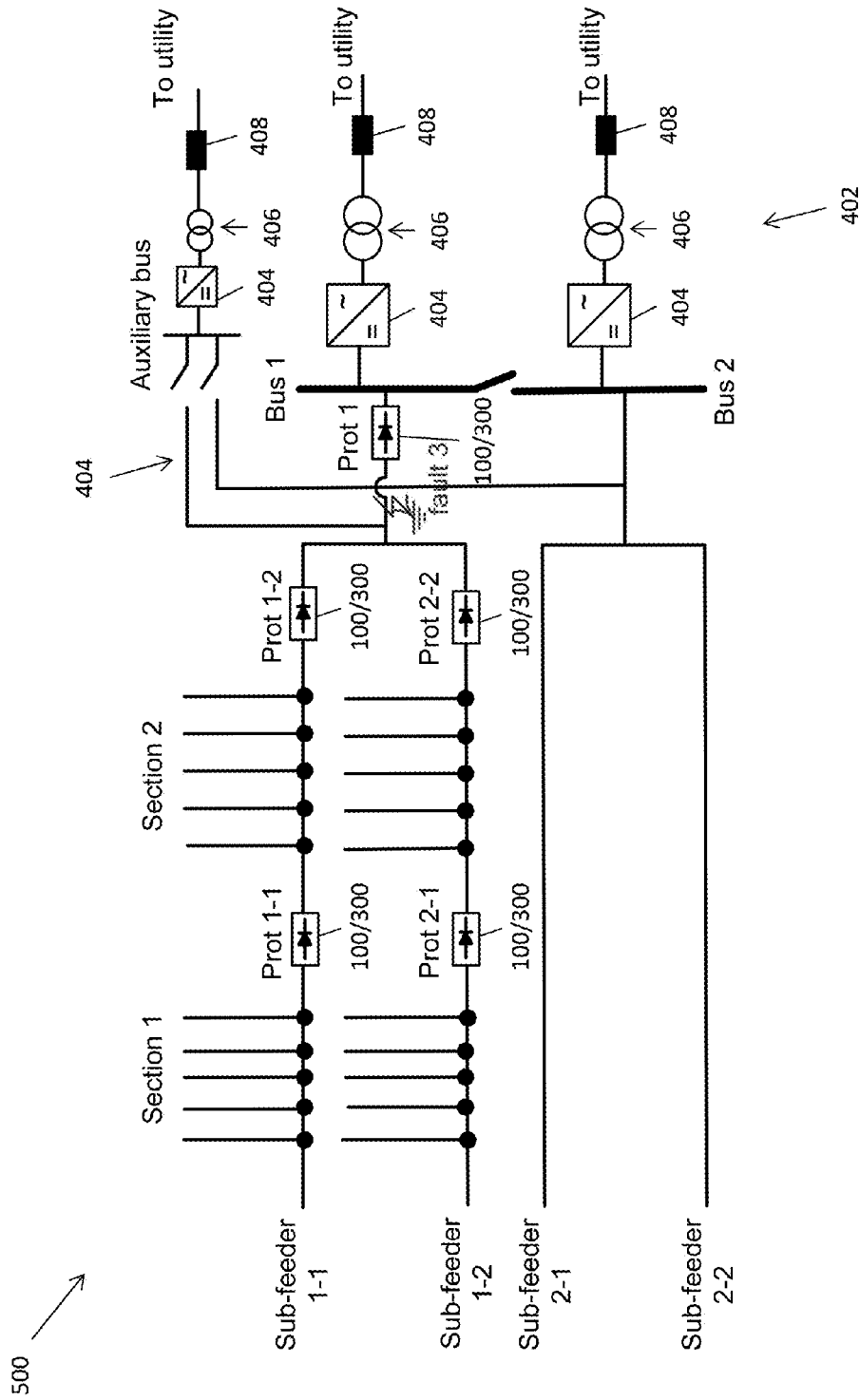


Figure 5

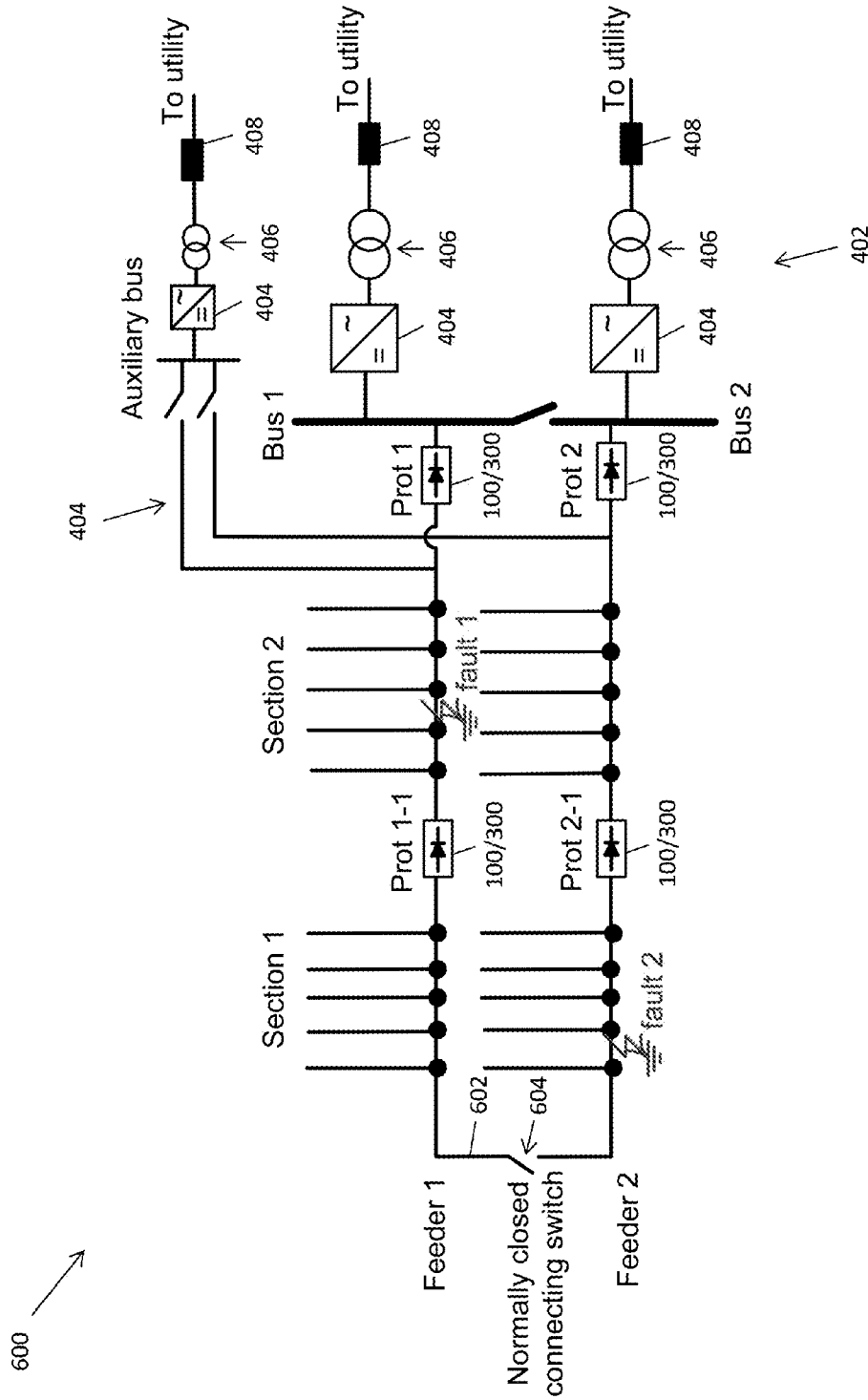


Figure 6

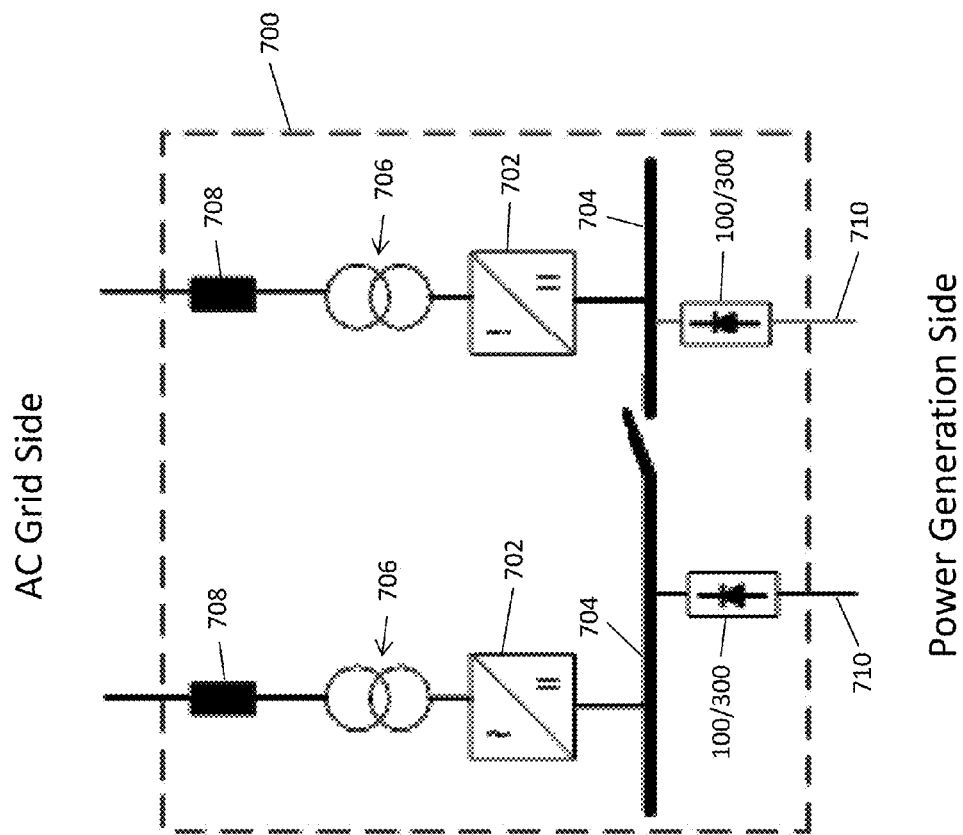


Figure 7

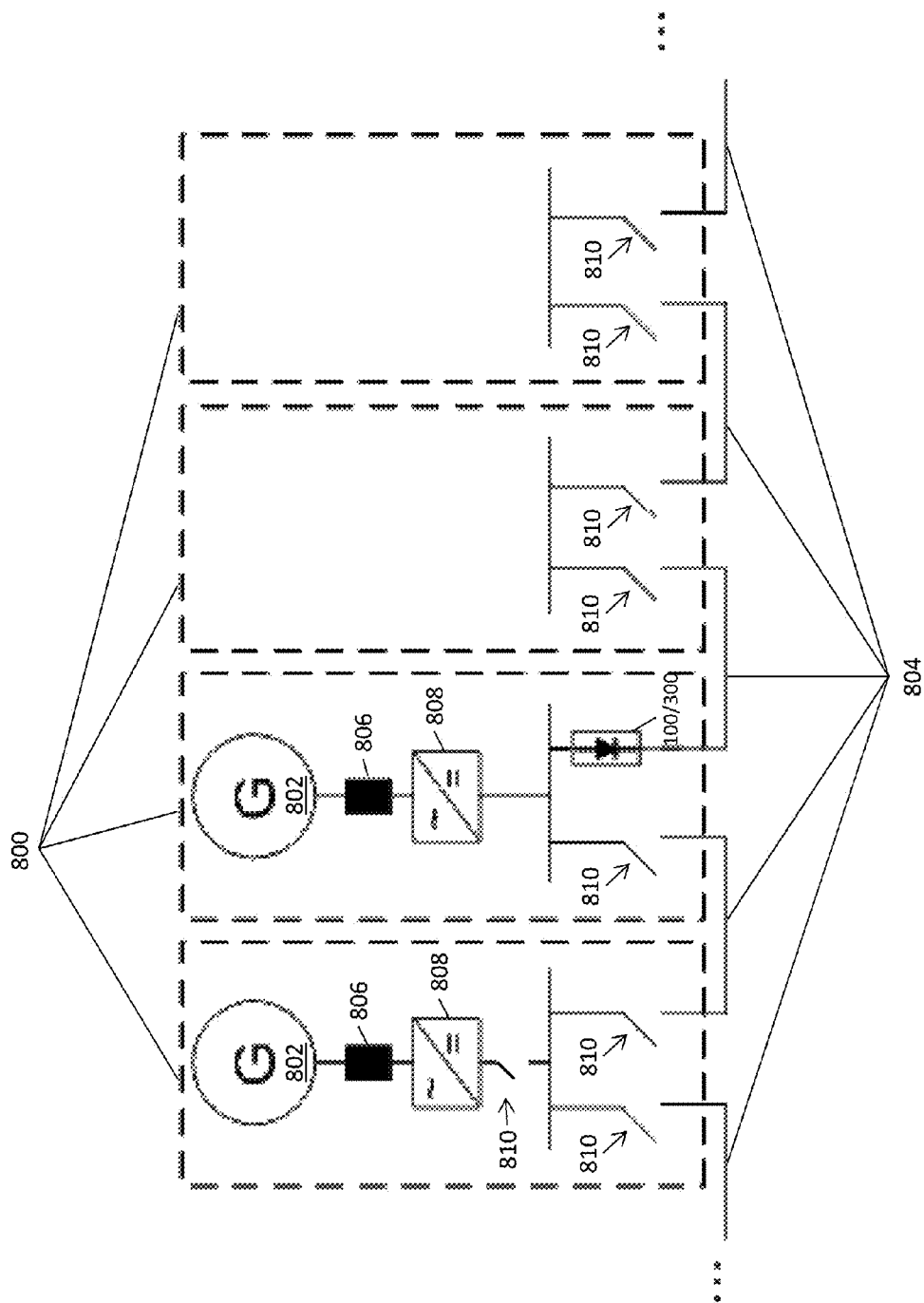


Figure 8

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PROTECTION DEVICE FOR DC COLLECTION SYSTEMS

TECHNICAL FIELD

The instant application relates to DC collection systems with renewable energy resources, and more particularly to protection devices for such DC collection systems.

BACKGROUND

Renewable energy resources, such as wind and solar, are becoming more widely utilized. DC collection systems can be used to collect power from individual renewable energy resources and transmit the collected power to a utility system. Depending on the type of renewable energy resource, converters at the renewable energy sources can be AC/DC rectifiers or DC/DC inverters. Power generated from the energy sources is collected by feeders and then aggregated at a grid interface station for further power conversion and voltage transformation.

Due to small resistance and lack of inductance, when a DC fault occurs, the rate of rise of DC fault current is quite fast and the peak fault current is typically much higher than nominal current. The fast rate of rise of DC fault current creates difficulties for fault isolation, and high DC fault current may damage equipment in the DC collection system. There exist different protection strategies for DC systems. Most depend on DC circuit breakers, which are expensive.

In another conventional approach for an HVDC (high-voltage DC) system transmitting electrical power from a DC to AC network through a voltage source converter (VSC), diodes are placed in series with the VSC on either the positive or negative DC line in unipolar or bipolar configurations. When there is a fault on the DC line, the fault current is limited or interrupted. From the HVDC classic rectifier side, the polarity of the DC voltage can be reversed by the controllable rectifiers. From the VSC inverter side, the series diode blocks the fault current flow from the AC network to the fault location on the DC line. However, blocking all fault-current contributing converters with series diodes is not a desirable protection solution for a multi-terminal DC power system such as DC collection systems for renewable resources due to widespread impacts of the fault on the entire DC system. Another conventional protection device for DC collections system includes a controller for detecting and isolating faults. A probe power unit is also provided to determine whether a fault persists after fault isolation, and to enable reconnection of the isolated segment if the fault is removed. In this case, the protection device implementation is nontrivial and adds significant cost to the DC collection system.

SUMMARY

According to the embodiments described herein, protection of DC collection systems is provided. Unidirectional DC protection devices are implemented with a diode, a fast no-load switch and a low-capacity charging switch. The unidirectional DC protection devices are placed at particular locations within a DC collection system to minimize outage risk caused by faults on feeders of the DC collection system. The arrangement of the DC protection devices together with corresponding protection measures and procedures yields fast protection and high system reliability of the protected DC distribution system at different operating conditions. The unidirectional DC protection devices described herein are low

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cost, have simple operating principals, and provide fast fault isolation due to natural diode reverse blocking.

According to an embodiment of a DC collection system, the system comprises a plurality of DC feeders for transferring power generated from energy sources to an AC grid interface and a plurality of protection devices for isolating the energy sources from faults on the DC feeders. Each protection device comprises a diode having its forward direction in the power flow to the AC grid interface, a first switch in parallel with the diode, a second switch in series with the diode, and a control unit. The control unit is operable to open the first switch so that current can flow through the diode in the forward direction without the first switch bypassing the diode, and close the first switch if no current is flowing through the diode in the forward direction and power is needed upstream of the diode. The control unit is further operable to close the second switch so that current can flow through the diode in the forward direction to the AC grid interface, and open the second switch if no current is flowing through the diode in the forward direction due to a fault in a DC feeder to which the protection device is coupled.

According to an embodiment of a method of transferring power from the DC collection system to an AC grid, the method comprises: opening the first switch of one of the protection devices so that current can flow through the diode of that protection device in the forward direction without the first switch bypassing the diode; closing the first switch of one of the protection devices if no current is flowing through the diode of that protection device in the forward direction and power is needed upstream of the diode; closing the second switch of one of the protection devices so that current can flow through the diode of that protection device in the forward direction to the AC grid interface; and opening the second switch of one of the protection devices if no current is flowing through the diode of that protection device in the forward direction due to a fault in a DC feeder to which the protection device is coupled.

According to an embodiment of a protection device for a DC collection system, the protection device comprises a diode having its forward direction in a normal power flow of a region of the DC collection system, a first switch in parallel with the diode, a second switch in series with the diode, and a control unit. The control unit is operable to open the first switch so that current can flow through the diode in the forward direction without the first switch bypassing the diode, and close the first switch if no current is flowing through the diode in the forward direction and power is needed upstream of the diode. The control unit is further operable to close the second switch so that current can flow through the diode in the forward direction to an AC grid interface of the DC collection system, and open the second switch if no current is flowing through the diode in the forward direction due to a fault in a DC feeder to which the protection device is coupled.

Those skilled in the art will recognize additional features and advantages upon reading the following detailed description, and upon viewing the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The components in the figures are not necessarily to scale, instead emphasis being placed upon illustrating the principles of the invention. Moreover, in the figures, like reference numerals designate corresponding parts. In the drawings:

FIG. 1 illustrates a block diagram of an embodiment of a protection device for a DC collection system.

FIG. 2 illustrates a flow diagram of an embodiment of a method of transferring power from a DC collection system to an AC grid.

FIG. 3 illustrates a block diagram of another embodiment of a protection device for a DC collection system.

FIG. 4 illustrates a block diagram of an embodiment of multiple unidirectional DC protection devices arranged in a DC collection system having a radial feeder configuration.

FIG. 5 illustrates a block diagram of an embodiment of multiple unidirectional DC protection devices arranged in a DC collection system having a radial feeder configuration with sub-feeders.

FIG. 6 illustrates a block diagram of an embodiment of multiple unidirectional DC protection devices arranged in a DC collection system having a ring feeder configuration.

FIG. 7 illustrates a block diagram of an embodiment of a feeder protection device included in a substation of a DC collection system.

FIG. 8 illustrates a block diagram of an embodiment of a section protection device included in an energy system of a DC collection system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 illustrates an embodiment of a unidirectional DC protection device **100** for DC collection systems. The protection device **100** includes a diode **102** arranged with its forward direction in the normal power flow of a region of a DC collection system in which the protection device **100** is to be deployed. The normal power flow direction is from the power generation side of the DC collection system toward the AC grid interface side. Various deployment embodiments for the protection device **100** in a DC collection system are described in more detail later herein. Any standard power diode can be used as the diode **102** of the protection device **100**.

The protection device **100** also includes a charging switch **104** in parallel with the diode **102** and an isolation switch **106** in series with the diode **102**. The charging switch **104** commutates a small current upstream of the diode **102** in the reverse power flow direction i.e. from the AC grid interface side toward the power generation side of the DC collection system. The small current commutated by the charging switch **104** in the reverse power flow direction enables charging at the power generation side of the DC collection system e.g. during start-up. The charging switch **104** can be a mechanical switch or a semiconductor switch since the charging switch **104** commutates a small reverse current e.g. 20% or less of the normal current. Such a small reverse current would otherwise be blocked by the diode **102** if the charging switch **104** were omitted from the protection device **100**. The isolation switch **106** of the protection device **100** can be placed at either side of the diode **102**, and provides safe isolation of the protected circuit from the rest of the DC collection system in which the protection device **100** is deployed. The isolation switch **106** is a mechanical switch designed to handle rated current in the normal power flow direction when closed, and to provide galvanic isolation when opened during a fault.

The protection device **100** further includes a control unit **108** for controlling the switching state (opened/closed) of the charging and isolation switches **104**, **106**. The state of the switches **104**, **106** is controlled based on signals received from sensors and/or other state information for the DC collection system in which the protection device **100** is deployed. For example, a current sensor **110** for sensing current in the region of the DC collection system protected by the protection device **100** can be remote or collocated with the

control unit **108** as indicated by the dashed box in FIG. 1. In either case, the on/off state of the isolation switch **106** can be based on the sensed current and the on/off state of the charging switch **104** can be based on the operational status of the DC collection system (normal operation, charging/start-up, etc.).

In general, the control unit **108** issues control commands **1**, **2**) to open/close the isolation switch **106** and the charging switch **104**. For example during normal operation, if a reverse voltage is applied across the diode **102** due to a fault on a feeder section protected by the protection device **100**, normally less than a few microseconds is needed for the diode **102** to automatically turn off i.e. stop conducting in the forward direction. If the current sensor **110** detects zero current flowing through the diode **102**, a control command **1**) can be sent to open the isolation switch **106**. Since the time duration required for the diode **102** to turn on/off can be neglected, the action time of the isolation switch **106** determines the operation time of the unidirectional DC protection device **100**.

FIG. 2 illustrates an embodiment of a method of controlling the switching state of the charging and isolation switches **104**, **106** by the control unit **108** of the unidirectional DC protection device **100**. If the DC collection system is in normal operation i.e. generating power with no faults and not in startup mode (Block **200**), the control unit **108** opens the charging switch **104** and closes the isolation switch **106** (Block **202**). The charging switch **104** is opened so that current can flow through the diode **102** in the forward direction without the charging switch **104** bypassing the diode **102**. As a result, the charging switch **104** in parallel with the diode **102** is open and a large amount of power can flow through the diode **102** in the forward (normal power flow) direction. The isolation switch **106** is closed in normal operation so that current can flow through the diode **102** in the forward direction to an AC grid interface of the DC collection system without being blocked by the isolation switch **106**. If a fault such as a pole-to-pole fault or pole-to-ground fault occurs during normal operation in the region of the DC collection system protected by the protection device **100** and no current is flowing through the diode **102** in the forward direction due to the fault (Block **204**), the control unit **108** opens the isolation switch **106** (Block **206**). In one embodiment, a current sensor **110** included in or associated with the control unit **108** senses the current flowing through the diode **102** in the forward direction and the control unit **108** opens the isolation switch **106** responsive to the current sensor **110** indicating no current is flowing through the diode **102**. In this state, the isolation switch **106** provides galvanic isolation of the protected circuit from the rest of the DC collection system.

If the DC collection system is in startup mode with no faults i.e. preparing to generate and deliver power (Block **208**), the control unit **108** closes the charging switch **104** and closes the isolation switch **106** (Block **210**). The charging switch **104** is closed if no current is flowing through the diode **102** in the forward direction and power is needed upstream of the diode **102**. For example to charge cables and/or start-up wind turbines of a DC collections system, the charging switch **104** can be closed to permit a small amount of power to flow in the reverse direction. The isolation switch **106** is closed in the startup mode so that reverse current can flow through the protection device **100** toward the generation side without being blocked by the isolation switch **106**. In one embodiment, the control unit **108** closes the charging switch **104** and the isolation switch **106** responsive to a startup command that indicates power is needed upstream of the diode **102** in the opposite direction as the normal power flow. If a fault occurs during startup mode in the region of the DC collection system

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protected by the protection device **100** (Block **212**), the control unit **108** opens the charging switch **104** and then opens the isolation switch **106**. In the startup mode, the diodes **102** of the startup feeder are bypassed by charging switches **104**. If a fault occurs, the fault will be cleared by AC breaker **408** in FIG. 4.

FIG. 3 illustrates another embodiment of a unidirectional DC protection device **300** for DC collection systems. The embodiment shown in FIG. 3 is similar to the embodiment shown in FIG. 1. However, the protection device **300** further comprises at least one additional diode **302** in series with the first diode **102**. Each diode **102**, **302** has its forward direction in the normal power flow. The charging switch **104** is in parallel with the series-connected diodes **102**, **302** and the isolation switch **106** is in series with the series-connected diodes **102**, **302**. An RC snubber circuit **304**, **306** can be connected in parallel with each of the diodes **102**, **302** for providing dynamic voltage sharing. A surge arrester **308** can be connected in parallel with the series-connected diodes **102**, **302** for preventing overvoltage due to energy oscillations between fault inductance and system capacitance. Any standard RC snubber circuit and surge arrester can be used in the protection device. The control unit for the switches **104**, **106** of the protection device **300** is not shown in FIG. 3 for ease of illustration, but has the same functionality as the control unit **108** for the protection device **100** of FIG. 1.

FIG. 4 shows the arrangement of multiple instances of the unidirectional DC protection device **100/300** in a radial feeder DC wind farm collection system **400**. The DC collection system **400** includes DC feeders ('Feeder 1' and 'Feeder 2' in FIG. 4) for transferring power generated from energy sources to an AC grid interface. The energy sources (e.g. wind turbines in this case) are not shown in FIG. 4 for ease of illustration. Two feeders are shown in FIG. 4 for ease of illustration and explanation, but in general the DC collection system **400** can include any number of feeders.

The feeders provide connections to the buses ('Bus 1' and 'Bus 2' in FIG. 4) of the DC collection system **400**, which in turn are connected to an AC grid interface **402** of the system **400**. The AC grid interface **402** can include DC/AC converters **404**, transformers **406**, circuit breakers **408**, etc. and provides further power conversion and voltage transformation for the power aggregated at the grid interface **402** from the feeders. The protection devices **100/300** isolate the energy sources from faults on the DC feeders. At least some of the protection devices **100/300** connect the DC feeders to a DC bus that in turn connects the DC feeders to the AC grid interface **402**.

To improve system reliability, one or more of the DC feeders can be protected by at least two of the protection devices **100/300** so that each DC feeder has at least two separately isolatable sections (e.g. 'Section 1' and 'Section 2' in FIG. 4). For example, a unidirectional DC protection device **100/300** can be provided for each feeder ('Prot 1' and 'Prot 2' in FIG. 4) and for each feeder section ('Prot 1-1' and 'Prot 2-1' in FIG. 4). In this arrangement, feeder DC protection devices 'Prot 1' and 'Prot 2' protect the wind farm from faults between the collection bus and the second section ('Section 2') of the first and second feeders, as well as faults in the second section of each feeder. Section DC protection devices 'Prot 1-1' and 'Prot 2-1' protect the wind farm from faults in the first section ('Section 1') of each feeder. In case of failure of section DC protection device 'Prot 1-1' and 'Prot 2-1', feeder DC protection devices 'Prot 1' and 'Prot 2' protect the wind farm from any faults on the feeders.

If there is a fault ('fault 1' in FIG. 4) in the second section on the first feeder, no current can flow through feeder DC protection device 'Prot 1' and the isolation switch **106** of

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feeder DC protection device 'Prot 1' can be opened. All wind turbines connected to the first feeder are isolated from the rest of the DC wind farm. The rest of the wind farm thus continues operation without interruption. The converter or AC circuit breaker of each wind turbine connecting to the first feeder can interrupt fault current. The current flow directions measured at different wind turbines can be analyzed locally and communicated with neighboring wind turbines. In this way, correct fault location can be determined. Further measures can be taken to remove 'fault 1' or minimize the impacts of 'fault 1', and resume normal operation of the first feeder with most unaffected wind turbines.

At normal operation, if there is fault ('fault 2' in FIG. 4) in the first section ('Section 1') of the second feeder, no current flows through section DC protection device 'Prot 2-1' due to reverse blocking of the diode **102** and the wind turbines in the second section of the second feeder are not affected. Since no current flow through section DC protection device 'Prot 2-1', the isolation switch **106** of section DC protection device 'Prot 2-1' can be commanded to open. The wind turbines in the first section of the second feeder are thus isolated from the rest of the wind farm. The fault location, fault removal and system recovery measures are the same as mentioned above when there is a fault in the second section ('Section 2') of the first feeder.

At certain start-up modes of operation, when components such as cables, converter capacitors and auxiliary circuits in a wind farm need initial charging, the isolation switches **106** and the charging switches **104** of the unidirectional DC protection devices **100/300** can be closed to enable reverse power flow from the AC grid interface **402** to the power generation side of the DC collection system **400**. To provide feeder protection during start-up operation, an auxiliary bus **404** can be provided in parallel with the collection buses ('Bus 1' and 'Bus 2' in FIG. 4). The auxiliary bus **404** can be switched to connect to different feeders with the feeder DC protection devices **100/300** bypassed. For example during start-up operation of the first feeder, the auxiliary bus **404** can be connected only to the first feeder and disconnected from the other feeders. On the first feeder, the charging switch **104** of section DC protection device 'Prot 1-1' is closed to allow reverse charging current flow and the charging switch **104** of feeder DC protection device 'Prot 1' is open. If 'fault 1' occurs during the charging process, a circuit breaker **408** at the utility side of the auxiliary bus **404** can respond to the fault and open in response. With the diode **102** of feeder DC protection device 'Prot 1' blocking reverse power flow, the rest of the wind farm is not affected by 'fault 1' on the first feeder.

FIG. 5 shows the arrangement of multiple instances of the unidirectional DC protection device **100/300** in a DC wind farm collection system **500** having a bifurcated radial feeder configuration. At least some of the DC feeders are divided into at least two different DC sub-feeders. As shown in FIG. 5, the first feeder is split into 'sub-feeder 1-1' and 'sub-feeder 1-2' and the second feeder is split into 'sub-feeder 2-1' and 'sub-feeder 2-2'. The DC collection system can include any desired number of feeders and sub-feeders. Each of the DC sub-feeders is protected by at least two of the protection devices **100/300** so that each DC sub-feeder has at least two separately isolatable sections ('Section 1' and 'Section 2' in FIG. 5). The protection of any faults on the sub-feeders is the same as in the radial feeder configuration previously described herein. However, when 'fault 3' occurs on the first feeder, all wind turbines on the first feeder have to be isolated from the rest of the wind farm by the feeder DC protection device 'Port 1'.

FIG. 6 shows the arrangement of multiple instances of the unidirectional DC protection device **100/300** in a DC wind farm collection system **600** having a ring configuration. In FIG. 6, the ends of the first and second DC feeders are connected together by a connecting cable **602** through a connecting switch **604**. The connecting switch **604** can be normally closed or opened depending on different system operation strategies. The arrangement of the unidirectional DC protection devices **100/300** in a normally-closed ring DC wind farm collection system **600** is shown in FIG. 6. At normal operation, low current flows through the connecting cable **602** between the two feeders. If 'fault 1' occurs, both feeder DC protection device 'Prot 1' and feeder DC protection device 'Prot 2-1' can be opened since no current flows through the respective diodes **102**. The wind turbines in the second section of the second feeder are not affected. The converter or circuit breaker of each wind turbine on the affected sections interrupts the fault current. After 'fault 1' is located, further measures can be taken to remove 'fault 1' or minimize the impacts of 'fault 1', and resume the normal operation of most unaffected wind turbines. The wind turbines upstream of 'fault 1' in the first section ('Section 1') of the first feeder therefore can continue to supply power through the second feeder through the connecting cable **602**.

At normal operation and if 'fault 2' occurs, both section DC protection device 'Prot 1-1' and section DC protection device 'Prot 2-1' see no current and can be opened. The wind turbines in the second sections of both the first feeder and the second feeder are not affected. The converter or circuit breaker of each wind turbine on the affected sections interrupts the fault current. After 'fault 2' is located, further measures can be taken to remove 'fault 2' or minimize the impacts of 'fault 2', and resume the normal operation of most unaffected wind turbines.

If the connecting switch **604** is normally open instead of closed, the opening process for the DC protection devices **100/300** is the same as in the radial configuration previously described herein in connection with FIG. 4. After a fault is located and isolated, the connecting switch **604** can be closed to resume the normal operation of most unaffected wind turbines.

Compared to the radial and bifurcated radial feeder configurations previously described herein, the ring configuration can improve system reliability. If there is a fault in the second section ('Section 2') of either feeder, instead of stopping power supply from all wind turbines on the faulted feeder, the wind turbines in the first section ('Section 1') on the faulted feeder can still supply power through the connecting cable **602** and the healthy (non-faulty) feeder. That is, the isolation switch **106** of the protection devices **100/300** located on each side of the fault on one of the DC feeders is opened during the fault so that each section of the feeder upstream of the fault transfers power to another one of the DC feeders during the fault by the cable **602** connecting the DC feeders through the connecting switch **604**.

FIG. 7 illustrates the installation of the feeder DC protection devices **100/300** in a substation **700** of a DC collection system. The substation **700** includes DC/AC converters **702** coupled to buses **704** of a DC collection system, transformers **706** and circuit breakers **708** such as air case circuit breakers. Feeder DC protection devices **100/300** (e.g. 'Prot 1' and 'Prot 2' in FIGS. 4-6) connect the ends of the DC feeders **710** to the corresponding buses **704** of the DC collection system. According to one embodiment, the feeder DC protection devices **100/300** that connect the feeders **710** to the DC buses **704** of the DC collections system are disposed within the substation **700**.

FIG. 8 illustrates the installation of the section DC protection devices **100/300** in the energy sources **800** of a DC collection system. The energy sources **800** include generators **802** like wind turbines, tidal generators, diesel generators, distributed energy sources, solar arrays, etc. coupled to DC feeders **804** of the DC collection system. The energy sources **800** can further include components such as circuit breakers **806**, AC/DC inverters **808**, switches **810**, etc. for coupling the generators **802** the DC feeders **804**. Section DC protection devices **100/300** (e.g. 'Prot 1-1', 'Prot 1-2', 'Prot 2-1', and 'Prot 2-2' in FIGS. 4-6) connect the energy sources **800** to the DC feeders **804**. According to one embodiment, the section DC protection devices **100/300** that connect the energy sources **800** to the DC feeders **804** are disposed within the energy sources **800** e.g. housed in wind towers that generate power from wind energy.

Previously described herein are various embodiments of the arrangement of the unidirectional DC protection devices **100/300** in different types of DC collection systems with different configurations. The unidirectional DC protection devices **100/300** can be deployed in any type of DC collection system (high voltage, medium voltage, etc.) having any configuration (radial, ring, etc.), and the DC collection system can include any type of energy sources (renewable such as wind, solar, tidal, etc., gas, diesel, bio-diesel, etc.). The unidirectional DC protection devices **100/300** each include a diode **102**, a fast no-load switch **106** and a low-capacity charging switch **104**, and are placed at particular locations within the DC collection system to minimize outage risk caused by faults on feeders of the DC collection system.

Terms such as "first", "second", and the like, are used to describe various elements, regions, sections, etc. and are not intended to be limiting. Like terms refer to like elements throughout the description.

As used herein, the terms "having", "containing", "including", "comprising" and the like are open ended terms that indicate the presence of stated elements or features, but do not preclude additional elements or features. The articles "a", "an" and "the" are intended to include the plural as well as the singular, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise.

With the above range of variations and applications in mind, it should be understood that the present invention is not limited by the foregoing description, nor is it limited by the accompanying drawings. Instead, the present invention is limited only by the following claims and their legal equivalents.

What is claimed is:

1. A DC collection system, comprising:
 - a plurality of DC feeders for transferring power generated from energy sources to an AC grid interface;
 - a plurality of protection devices for isolating the energy sources from faults on the DC feeders, each protection device comprising a diode having its forward direction in the power flow to the AC grid interface, a first switch in parallel with the diode, a second switch in series with the diode, and a control unit operable to:
 - open the first switch so that current can flow through the diode in the forward direction without the first switch bypassing the diode, and close the first switch if no current is flowing through the diode in the forward direction and power is needed upstream of the diode; and
 - close the second switch so that current can flow through the diode in the forward direction to the AC grid interface, and open the second switch if no current is

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flowing through the diode in the forward direction due to a fault in a DC feeder to which the protection device is coupled; and

a plurality of current sensors each operable to sense the current flowing through one of the diodes in the forward direction,

wherein the control unit of each protection device is operable to open the second switch responsive to the corresponding current sensor indicating no current is flowing through the diode in the forward direction.

2. The DC collection system of claim 1, wherein at least some of the protection devices connect the DC feeders to a DC bus that connects the DC feeders to the AC grid interface.

3. The DC collection system of claim 2, wherein the AC grid interface comprises a substation operable to convert DC power collected from the plurality of DC feeders to AC power, and wherein the protection devices that connect the DC feeders to the DC bus are disposed within the substation.

4. The DC collection system of claim 1, wherein at least some of the energy sources are wind towers that generate power from wind energy, and wherein the protection devices that connect the DC feeders to the wind towers are disposed within the respective wind towers.

5. The DC collection system of claim 1, wherein the DC feeders are protected by at least two of the protection devices so that each DC feeder has at least two separately isolatable sections.

6. The DC collection system of claim 5, wherein the DC feeders are arranged in a radial configuration, and wherein the second switch of the protection device located downstream of a fault on one of the DC feeders is opened during the fault so that each section of the DC feeder downstream of the protection device with the opened second switch continues to transfer power to the AC grid interface.

7. The DC collection system of claim 5, wherein the DC feeders are arranged in a ring configuration, and wherein the second switch of the protection devices located on each side of a fault on one of the DC feeders is opened during the fault so that each section of the feeder upstream of the fault transfers power to another one of the DC feeders during the fault by a cable connecting the DC feeders through a connecting switch.

8. The DC collection system of claim 5, wherein at least some of the DC feeders are divided in to at least two different DC sub-feeders, and wherein each of the DC sub-feeders is protected by at least two of the protection devices so that each DC sub-feeder has at least two separately isolatable sections.

9. The DC collection system of claim 1, further comprising an auxiliary bus operable to connect at least some of the DC feeders to the AC grid interface during a startup mode in which power is required to flow upstream in the opposite direction as the normal power flow.

10. The DC collection system of claim 9, wherein the control unit of each protection device coupled to the auxiliary bus is operable to close the first switch and the second switch responsive to a startup command that indicates the DC collection system is in the startup mode.

11. The DC collection system of claim 1, wherein the current sensors are collocated with the respective protection devices.

12. A protection device for a DC collection system, the protection device comprising:

a diode having its forward direction in a normal power flow of a region of the DC collection system;
a first switch in parallel with the diode;
a second switch in series with the diode;
a control unit operable to:

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open the first switch so that current can flow through the diode in the forward direction without the first switch bypassing the diode, and close the first switch if no current is flowing through the diode in the forward direction and power is needed upstream of the diode; and

close the second switch so that current can flow through the diode in the forward direction to an AC grid interface of the DC collection system, and open the second switch if no current is flowing through the diode in the forward direction due to a fault in a DC feeder to which the protection device is coupled; and

a current sensor operable to sense the current flowing through the diode in the forward direction,

wherein the control unit is operable to open the second switch responsive to the current sensor indicating no current is flowing through the diode in the forward direction.

13. The protection device of claim 12, wherein the control unit is operable to close the first switch and the second switch responsive to a startup command that indicates a startup mode in which power is needed upstream of the diode in the opposite direction as the normal power flow.

14. The protection device of claim 12, further comprising at least one additional diode in series with the diode and each diode having its forward direction in the normal power flow, and wherein the first switch is in parallel with the series-connected diodes and the second switch is in series with the series-connected diodes.

15. The protection device of claim 14, further comprising an RC snubber circuit in parallel with each of the diodes.

16. The protection device of claim 14, further comprising a surge arrester in parallel with the series-connected diodes.

17. The protection device of claim 12, wherein the first and the second switches are both mechanical switches.

18. ADC collection system, comprising:

a plurality of DC feeders for transferring power generated from energy sources to an AC grid interface;

a plurality of protection devices for isolating the energy sources from faults on the DC feeders, each protection device comprising a diode having its forward direction in the power flow to the AC grid interface, a first switch in parallel with the diode, a second switch in series with the diode, and a control unit operable to:

open the first switch so that current can flow through the diode in the forward direction without the first switch bypassing the diode, and close the first switch if no current is flowing through the diode in the forward direction and power is needed upstream of the diode; and

close the second switch so that current can flow through the diode in the forward direction to the AC grid interface, and open the second switch if no current is flowing through the diode in the forward direction due to a fault in a DC feeder to which the protection device is coupled; and

an auxiliary bus operable to connect at least some of the DC feeders to the AC grid interface during a startup mode in which power is required to flow upstream in the opposite direction as the normal power flow.

19. The DC collection system of claim 18, wherein the control unit of each protection device coupled to the auxiliary bus is operable to close the first switch and the second switch responsive to a startup command that indicates the DC collection system is in the startup mode.

20. A protection device for a DC collection system, the protection device comprising:

a diode having its forward direction in a normal power flow
of a region of the DC collection system;
a first switch in parallel with the diode;
a second switch in series with the diode; and
a control unit operable to: 5
 open the first switch so that current can flow through the
 diode in the forward direction without the first switch
 bypassing the diode, and close the first switch if no
 current is flowing through the diode in the forward
 direction and power is needed upstream of the diode; 10
 and
 close the second switch so that current can flow through
 the diode in the forward direction to an AC grid inter-
 face of the DC collection system, and open the second
 switch if no current is flowing through the diode in the 15
 forward direction due to a fault in a DC feeder to
 which the protection device is coupled,
wherein the control unit is operable to close the first switch
and the second switch responsive to a startup command
that indicates a startup mode in which power is needed 20
upstream of the diode in the opposite direction as the
normal power flow.

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